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DE RUEHPO #0617/01 3381122  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9834  
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 1505  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1638  
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO 1204

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARAMARIBO 000617

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WHA/CAR FOR JACKIE ROSHOLT, INR FOR BOB CARHART, WHA/PPC  
FOR MIKE BORDERS, POL/AD FOR LAMSELEM, BRASILIA FOR DATT  
BBUTCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASIC](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [NS](#)

SUBJECT: JUSTICE MINISTER TALKS PRIVATELY ABOUT STRIKES,  
THREATS, POLITICS, AND THE "DECEMBER MURDERS TRIAL" IN  
SURINAME

REF: PARAMARIBO 609

Classified By: Ambassador in accordance with E.O. 12958

11. (U) From Ambassador Lisa Bobbie Schreiber Hughes.

12. (C) In response to my telephone request, Justice and  
Police Minister Chandrikapersad Santokhi invited me and my  
RSO, Doug Marvin, to attend his November 29 meeting with  
Dutch Ambassador Tanya van Gool and her political officer to  
discuss possible threats to public order occasioned by the  
November 30 start of the December Murders "process" (the  
trial of Desi Bouterse and 24 co-defendants for the December  
8, 1982 murder of fifteen political opponents). Both we and  
the Dutch had requested meetings out of concern for the  
safety and security of our citizens given recent events in  
Paramaribo.

13. (C) The week began with Desi Bouterse,s flamboyant and  
incendiary public rally on November 26 at his NDP party  
headquarters. Among other accusations, Bouterse said  
Minister Santhoki was trying to kill him. The next day, the  
bus drivers went on strike, followed by strike threats by the  
teachers, union. Minister Santokhi struck back on November  
28, telling journalists that Bouterse and the NDP have plans  
for "grand scale destabilization," including attacks on  
prominent law enforcement officials (especially Santokhi  
himself). Although all this rhetoric appears on the surface  
to be occasioned by Bouterse,s desire to disrupt the  
November 30 start of the trial, Minister Santokhi and  
Attorney General Subhas Punwasi (both present at the meeting)  
emphasized that Bouterse and his NDP have a larger goal: to  
overthrow the government.

14. (C) In our November 29 meeting, Santokhi told us that  
the GOS has a robust plan in place to protect public order  
from NDP attempts to destabilize the country. Executing the  
plan jointly are Chief of Police Delano Braam, Chief of the  
Armed Forces Col. Ernst Mercuur, and the Central Intelligence  
and Security Agency (CIVD; Col. Johan Ceder). Santokhi  
confirmed that he is a primary target, and his security is  
tight. The police have already arrested criminal elements,  
backed by Bouterse, with plans to kill Santokhi. These  
criminals were arrested on drug charges only (there is no law  
against conspiracy to assassinate a Minister; only the  
President or Acting President). Santokhi said that part of  
Bouterse,s strategy is to accuse Santokhi of trying to kill  
him so that if "something" were to happen to Santokhi, the  
action would be seen as "justified". This, he said, was a  
similar strategy to that employed by Bouterse and his regime

in the 1980,s. He said that many "older politicians" see the situation now (strident rhetoric, strikes, threats) as reminiscent of the 1980s. Some newspapers have echoed this sentiment.

15. (C) Americans are not targets, and in response to my direct question, the Minister did not see the need for us to change our daily routines, turn away TDY visitors, or avoid travel in the interior. Both the Minister and AG Punwasi noted that Bouterse blames Holland for his troubles, but never the Americans, French, or other Europeans (note: others listening to Bouterse,s rhetoric would refute this, as he referred to interference in Suriname from those in "foreign capitals"). Ominously, Santokhi noted that if/when there is a catalyzing event (e.g., if Bouterse were to be convicted), then intelligence indicates that the Dutch ("white people") would be targeted. I responded that many AmCits could be mistaken for Dutch citizens. Bottom line: in the absence of a catalyzing event, I inferred no direct threat to foreigners: Dutch, Americans, or others.

16. (C) Of greater concern now is whether Bouterse supporters, attempts at public disruption through strikes and other means are sufficient to stir up enough public discontent to create violence. Currently, this is far from the case. Except for the absence of (mini) buses, Paramaribo is functioning normally. However, Santokhi confirmed that all unions under the NDP-aligned "Moederbond" are expected to eventually strike. For example, he knows that three of the seven unions in his Justice and Police Ministry are planning to strike. They are the penitentiary workers, the fire brigade, and the BBS (security at government buildings). The GOS is taking the current strikes, and the threat of additional strikes, very seriously by taking preemptive steps

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to eliminate reasons for strikers, discontent. For example, the GOS has given money and chits for medical care directly to members of the armed forces, enough to last through February, 2008. In the case of striking bus drivers and teachers, the Ministers of Transportation and Education are negotiating, aided by teams of fellow Ministers. Santokhi said that no Minister negotiates alone; and all negotiation decisions must be taken to the Council of Ministers.

17. (C) Minister Santokhi expressed satisfaction that, to date, the public has not supported the protesters. Both he and the AG emphasized that, when the public understands the political objectives behind the strikes (i.e., to create unrest), there is no support. That said, and despite the robust security measures that Santokhi touted at the beginning of our meeting, both the Minister and AG Punwasi still expressed concern about the eventuality of unrest and violence, possibly including assassinations. Santokhi said the GOS has hard evidence that (NDP Parliamentarian) Mohamed Doekhie is recruiting criminal elements in Guyana to destabilize and overthrow the government, and that Bouterse claims he will take over "before the end of the year". They asked for "advice and assistance" from the Dutch and ourselves, presumably in the event the government is in jeopardy.

18. (C) COMMENT: Although the worst-case scenario posited by Santokhi and Punwasi is chilling, it is also premature. Although the trial began today (November 30), Santokhi and Punwasi told us that they don,t expect much action until January or February (if that soon). Clearly, if Bouterse is convicted (the catalyzing event), it will not happen in the short term. Also unknown is the depth and strength of support for Bouterse, and how many true followers he can muster. Currently, our best security advice is to maintain enhanced "situational awareness" and to "avoid the areas of demonstrations and to exercise caution in the vicinity of any demonstrations," as our November 30 Warden Message notes.

END COMMENT

GENTON